THE DANCING GIRLS OF CADIZ

By A. T. FEAR

Cadiz’s main claim to fame in antiquity was its situation at the end of the known world and its temple to Hercules which was visited by many famous personalities of antiquity; however, perhaps surprisingly, given Seneca and Pliny’s insistence on the sobriety of the Spanish character, Cadiz had another well known attraction, its dancing girls, leading to Martial dubbing the town ‘Laughing Cadiz’, ‘Icosae Gades’. The vast majority of our references to this aspect of the town’s life are from writers of the early Imperial period such as Juvenal, Martial, and Statius. Nevertheless our earliest reference to it dates some three centuries earlier. Strabo gives an account of Posidonius which tells us of the explorer Eudoxus’ attempts to find a route to India, avoiding the tax monopoly of the Ptolemies. Convinced that Africa could be circumnavigated, Eudoxus built a ‘great ship’, πλοίον μέγα, at Cadiz and embarked, amongst other things, ‘slaves trained in music’, μουσικὰ παιδισκάρια, presumably to trade at the court of the Indian kings. The voyage failed, though Eudoxus was sufficiently encouraged to attempt a second voyage on which he disappeared, never to be seen again. We are not told of the fate of his human cargo. Although παιδισκάρια could indicate either sex, given our later references, it seems clear that dancing girls are being referred to here. The story shows therefore that they were an established feature of the town well before the Imperial period.

Another feature of the story is the indication that the girls were normally slaves. This is born out by our later references. Of these Juvenal is the most explicit when he refers to the dancers as possessions, ‘mancipia’. Martial speaks of the ‘ancilla’, i.e. slave dancing girl, Telethusa, ‘skilled at performing wanton gestures to Baetican castanets and dancing to Gaditane tunes’, who was first sold and then bought back by her former master. The implication here is that the girl was a personal slave; however, it also seems that troupes of Gaditane dancing girls were owned to be hired out. Martial describing the typical low life of Rome lists among the sundry sausage sellers, etc., ‘the wicked pimp from Cadiz’. Such a man would have catered to a low class market; however, more refined versions of the same product were also available. The Younger Pliny complaining good naturally about Septicius Clarus’ non-appearance at a dinner party, remarks that Septicius will suffer for his preference
to attend others where a variety of exotic food and ‘Gaditanae’ are on offer.\textsuperscript{10} Martial too, when making a virtue of his own poverty, remarks he can only offer a single flute player not a troupe of ‘Gaditanae’.\textsuperscript{11}

The dancing girls therefore covered the entire social spectrum and were owned individually and as groups for hire. What, however, can we tell about the nature of the entertainment they offered? The dancing involved was of a highly erotic nature and apparently had a devastating effect on its audience.\textsuperscript{12} The style of the dance itself appears to have been very similar to that of the present day belly dancers of the Middle East; one ‘Gaditana’ is said to ‘so tremulously move her thighs, so alluringly gyrate’;\textsuperscript{13} another description refers to ‘Gaditanae’ ‘wantonly shaking without ceasing their lascivious loins in trained measure’.\textsuperscript{14} Finally it appears that a trembling descent to the floor, a common feature of belly dancing, normally known as the ‘shimmy’,\textsuperscript{15} was also practiced by the ‘Gaditanae’.\textsuperscript{16}

The dancers used a form of castanet, or cruismata, as part of their performance. Martial’s Telethusa, as seen above, was said to be skilled in the use of Baetican castanets, and Statius refers to the ‘cymbals and tinkling music of Cadiz’.\textsuperscript{17} On another occasion Martial tells us the material these castanets were made of when he speaks of ‘Tartessic bronze’, ‘Tartesiaca aera’.\textsuperscript{18} Again this form of accompaniment is paralleled in modern belly dancing where the dancer will often wear small brass cymbals called ‘sagat’ or ‘zills’ on her fngers.\textsuperscript{19} The dancing was also accompanied by erotic songs.\textsuperscript{20} Martial when referring to a transvestite who has learnt to dance in this fashion, (‘he moves his depilated arms to varied measures’\textsuperscript{21}), also says he murmurs the songs of the Nile and Cadiz.\textsuperscript{22} Juvenal too warns a potential guest for dinner that it is no use expecting Gaditane songs,\textsuperscript{23} and speaks of hearing the rattle of castanets to the accompaniment of song.\textsuperscript{24}

The dress of the dancers is unclear: on a black and white pavement in the Vatican Library there is a picture of a dancer, with crotalia, wearing a long diaphanous robe.\textsuperscript{25} This too has its parallels in modern belly dancing\textsuperscript{26} and could be what Juvenal is referring to with poetic license when he calls the dancers naked possessions, ‘nuda mancipia’.\textsuperscript{27} Although this seems the most likely solution, given the mores of Rome at this period, we cannot rule out the possibility that Juvenal, at least on occasions, was being entirely literal in his description.\textsuperscript{28} The dancing of Telethusa described in the Corpus Priapeum suggests a much shorter dress than that found on the Vatican Library mosaic.\textsuperscript{29} If J. P. V. D. Balsdon is right that the women athletes depicted on the Piazza Amerina mosaics are really
dancing girls, some sort of Bikini style dress, perhaps made of leather, may be another possibility.\textsuperscript{30}

Unfortunately the history of individual girls is almost impossible to trace. Martial twice mentions a Telethusa,\textsuperscript{31} and this name also appears twice in the Corpus Priapeum, where once she is referred to as a dancing girl, ‘circulatrix’,\textsuperscript{32} and then as a ‘girl from Subura’ (an area of Rome notorious for its prostitutes).\textsuperscript{33} It is tempting to believe that all these references are to one particular girl, who would then have been sold by one master, bought her freedom from a second, and consequently been taken as a lover by her first master. However, Telethusa was probably a common name for such girls; nevertheless the date of the Corpus Priapeum could coincide with Martial which would lead this intriguing possibility open.\textsuperscript{34} The Corpus Priapeum also mentions a Quintia, a ‘star of the circus’ who was a belly dancer and so could have been a ‘Gaditana’, but sadly does not refer to her nationality explicitly.\textsuperscript{35} From Milan we have an inscription recording a Lesbia, ‘whom the fair land of Tarsis bore’.\textsuperscript{36} It has been suggested that Tarsis is the Punic spelling of Tarsis and consequently Lesbia is a ‘Gaditana’. This is an attractive possibility, but an Eastern interpretation is equally possible.\textsuperscript{37} Two more certain traces can be found on tombstones from Rome itself. One of these is a small fragment and reads Gaditan[o]. It has normally been restored Gaditana, but given the presence of ‘Gaditanae’ in the city, Gaditana seems at least equally plausible, if not preferable.\textsuperscript{38} The other stone is more explicit and refers to ‘Carpima Gaditana’ and should be the tomb of a dancing girl.\textsuperscript{39}

The origins of the dancing are an intriguing question. As we have seen, the style is very similar to the belly dancing of the Near East. García y Bellido thought that ‘Gaditana’ was a general reference to Andalucia as a whole,\textsuperscript{40} but apart from the reference to Baetican crustmata and Tartessian aera, all our references are to Cadiz itself; moreover, given the frequent identification of Tartessos with Cadiz in antiquity,\textsuperscript{41} this latter reference too may be specifically to Cadiz.

Cadiz was a Phoenician foundation, and it is noticeable that in antiquity the other area famous for this style of dancing was the East. Syrian dancing girls, or ambubaia, are frequently referred to in our sources.\textsuperscript{42} Automedon’s praise of a dancing girl from Asia, who ‘quivers from her tender finger tips in wicked postures’,\textsuperscript{43} shows the similarity of the dance style. The connection is made explicit by a scholion on the passage of Juvenal quoted above. This explains the reference to ‘Gaditanae’ as ‘that is to say “perhaps you are hoping that beautiful and delightful Syrian girls are going to dance” since Cadiz was founded by Syrians and Africans (i.e. Carthaginians)’\textsuperscript{44}
The ‘Gaditanae’ should therefore represent part of Cadiz’s Phoenician heritage, and if they did not hail from Cadiz itself, should have come from the heavily Punicized Mediterranean coast of Baetica rather than other parts of the Province. They are in this respect another instance of the staying power of Punic customs in the region.

That the style of dancing described above has some parallels with the flamenco dancing of present day Andalucia has been remarked on by many commentators, but while it is true that flamenco probably has an Eastern origin, it is more likely to have been introduced into the region by the Arabic invasion of the eighth century or migrant gypsies in the fifteenth century A.D. than be an unbroken cultural inheritance from the days of Phoenician settlement. The comments made on the subject vary: Schulten believed that the flamenco of Cadiz was more erotic than the restrained versions found at Seville and Granada; the nineteenth-century traveller Richard Ford, on the other hand, believed ‘Seville is now in these matters what Gades was’.

Clearly there is scope for future research in this field. The last word on the subject ought to be left again to Ford who wisely remarked ‘every young antiquarian ought to witness this exhibition’.

NOTES

1. Horace, Odes 2.2.11; Juvenal, 10.1–2.
2. For a visit by Julius Caesar, see Suetonius, Div. Jul. 7, and for a complete survey of the temple, see A. Garcia y Bellido, ‘Hercules Gaditanus’, AeA 36 (1963), 70ff.
4. Martial, 1.61.9.
8. Martial, 6.71.6: ‘he sold her as a slave and now buys her back as his mistress.’ Although this shows he took her as a lover there is no need to assume any more permanent relationship.
12. Martial, 14.204, entitled ‘Puella Gaditana’: ‘she would have made Hippolytus masturbate.’ This ability to arouse the paragon of chastity, Hippolytus, is a common trope in Roman erotic poetry: cf. Ovid, Amores 2.4.29ff. and Corpus Priapeum 19.
16. Juvenal, 11.163–4: ‘and to applause the knowing girls drop to the ground with trembling buttocks’ (‘plausuque probatae ad terram tremulo descendant clune puellae’).
17. Statius, Silvae 1.6.71: ‘cymbala tinnulaeque Gades.’
22. Martial, 3.63.5: ‘cantica qui Nili, qui Gaditana susurrat.’
24. Juvenal, 11.171–2: ‘audiat ille testarum crepitus cum verbis’ (‘let him listen to the rattle of the castanets and their songs’).
25. Daremberg-Saglio, Dictionnaire des Antiquités (Paris, 1877), 4.2.1106, fig. 6142.
26. On the other hand the use of the veil, a common modern feature, is less clearly attested. However, a statuette of a veiled dancer wearing a diaphanous robe has been found at Alexandria (D. Burr Thompson, ‘A Bronze Dancer from Alexandria’, AJA. 54 [1950], 371ff.), so it was used at least on occasions in antiquity.
29. Corpus Priapeum 19: ‘Telethusa . . . who without any covering robe, thrusts out and moves her buttocks higher and higher and will flaut before you her quivering loin’ (‘Telethusa . . . quae clunem tunica tegente nulla extans altius altiusque motat, crissabat tibi fluctante lumbo’).
32. Corpus Priapeum 19.
33. Corpus Priapeum 40.
35. Corpus Priapeum 27: ‘Deliciae populi, magno notissima circo, Quintia, vibratas docta movere nates, cymbala cum crotalis, pruriginis arma, Priapo ponit et adducta tympana pulsa manu . . .’ (‘The people’s darling and great circus star, Quintia, skilled at wiggling her quivering rump, dedicates to Priapus her lascivious arms, her cymbals and castanets, along with the tambourines she struck by hand . . .’).
36. CIL 5.6134: ‘quam tulerat tellus pulcherrima Tarsis.’
37. If ‘Tarsis’ is Gades, perhaps Claudia Tarsis (CIL 6.9068) and Gavina Tarsis (CIL 6.3500) were also ‘Gaditaniæ’.
38. CIL 6.30430.2.
39. CIL 6.9013.
40. ‘locosae Gades’, BRAH 129 (1951), 97.
41. See Avienus, Or. Mar. 269; Valerius Maximus, 8.13.4; Silius Italicus, 5.339.
42. The most famous example is the opening lines of Virgil’s Copia.
43. The Garland of Philip, ed. A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page (Cambridge, 1968), Automedon 1: τὴν ἀπὸ Ἁοίης ὅρχησιδα, τὴν κακοτέχνης χαμάσαις ἐξ ἀπαλῶν κινομένην ὄνοιχνον αἰώνιον οὖν εἰς τὴν Ἀργολίδα οὖ ὁμοφων ἀνάμεινεν αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον αἰώνιον...’
44. ‘id est, speras forstian, quod incipient saltare delicatae ac pulchrae puellae Syriacae, quoniam de Syris et Afris Gades condita est.’
45. For example, A. Schulten, Tartessos (Madrid, 2nd ed. 1945), pp. 238–9.
46. op cit., above.